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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000296

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SUBJECT: YEMENIS REVIEW REGIONAL ISSUES WITH CODEL REYES

Classified By: AMBASSADOR THOMAS C. KRAJESKI, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During meetings on February 19, President Saleh and Foreign Minister Abu Bakr al-Qirbi reviewed for visiting CODEL Reyes Yemen's views on Somalia, Iraq, Syria, Iran and Afghanistan. The Yemenis expressed support for the USG's approach in Somalia, voiced grave concern over Iran's meddling in the region, and urged that the United States re-engage with Syria to remove that country "from its embrace with Iran." The USG must talk to all political actors in Iraq and Afghanistan, including al-Qaida and the Taliban, in order to achieve progress in those countries. "You cannot spend all of your time talking only to your friends," Saleh advised, "because you already know what they think. You must also talk to your enemies." END SUMMARY

12. (C) President Saleh told a Congressional Delegation led by Rep. Silvestre Reyes that he considered the group "one of the most important delegations to visit Yemen in a long time" and for that reason wished to share his views on a wide range of regional topics. Saleh, who normally receives visitors for no more than 45 minutes, spoke with the group for 90 minutes, assuring the congressmen that Yemen's counter-terrorism work with the United States "is not seasonal -- we will continue until we get rid of terrorists completely." Yemen realizes that the damage caused by terrorism affects not only the United States, but the entire world.

IRAQ

13. (C) Saleh began his tour d'horizon with Iraq, noting that the coalition forces' failure there began when Ambassador Bremer "supported Iraqis taking revenge on Baathists" by dismissing the army, security forces and bureaucrats, who then became part of the resistance. Saleh said he had advised previously that U.S. forces should re-deploy to bases outside the cities, let Iraqis run their own affairs, and not "get killed in the streets." The USG should sponsor a dialogue with all political forces in Iraq, to include not only the Sunnis and Shia, but also Baathists, al-Qaida and the insurgents. "You cannot talk only to your friends," Saleh advised, "because you already know what they think. You must also talk to your enemies." Saleh then offered to put the Congressmen in contact with a number of retired Baathist generals now living in Yemen and Syria who could promote

stability in Iraq and counter "Shia influence in the region from Iran."

IRAN

¶4. (C) Turning to Iran, Saleh said that that country is "behind all the problems in the region," from southern Saudi Arabia to Najaf, and from Lebanon to Bahrain. Iran is "supporting twelver extremists here" in order to "settle scores with the United States," Saleh said, referring to supporters of Abdulmalik al-Houthi in the Saada province of Yemen.

SYRIA

¶5. (C) Asked by Congressman Darrell Issa how the USG could pull Syria away from its alliance with Iran, Saleh said the USG must take a "deep breath" and re-engage in a dialogue with Syria. "It is not something you can resolve in 24 hours," Saleh said, "but it must be done." The international community, led by the United States, must "convince Syria that it is secure, because the more we pressure Syria, the closer it moves to Iran." Saleh said that he had "advised Bashar a lot and he has learned a lot," and Saleh was convinced that Syria would "play a positive role" should the USG seek to re-engage it.

SOMALIA

SANAA 00000296 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Saleh reiterated his support for the USG approach in Somalia, noting that the International Contact Group on Somalia met recently with Yemen in attendance in order to "discuss ways to prevent that country from becoming another safehaven for terrorists like Afghanistan was."

AFGHANISTAN

¶7. (C) Saleh advised the CODEL that the USG must "dialogue with the Taliban," because the current government in Kabul is a "burden on your shoulders" and cannot control the whole country. This dialogue could be conducted in cooperation with Pakistan.

¶8. (C) Congressman Reyes thanked Saleh for his candid views, noting the role of Congress in overseeing foreign affairs agency, but not actually making foreign policy. He said he was interested in pursuing Saleh's offer to put the Congressmen in contact with Iraqi Baathist generals. Representative Reyes also said he hoped that more congressional delegations would visit Yemen in the near future to further develop our strong bilateral relationship.

¶9. (U) CODEL Reyes did not have an opportunity to clear this cable.
KRAJESKI